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James H. Armstrong, Sr., M.D.

2986 Rufenach Lane, Kalispell, MT 59901

January 29, 2007

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee
Montana House of Representatives

RE: House Bill 311

As a Montana physician for 43 years, who served as the medical director for two chemical dependency programs for 20 years, I am quite familiar with concerns that some may have about the subject of medical marijuana. Nonetheless, I write to explain my strong support for House Bill 311.

In particular, I urge your support of the provisions in this legislation which would allow Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants to sign recommendations for patients to use medical marijuana when its use is warranted.

This provision is a natural extension of what NPs and PAs already do for patients all over Montana. Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants commonly diagnose conditions, deliver primary healthcare to patients, and prescribe opiates and other pharmaceuticals that are widely known to have serious side effects. In contrast, medical marijuana is similarly widely known to provide important relief to certain kinds of patients, without risks of consequence, often allowing them to reduce or eliminate their need for other drugs. Montana's medical marijuana law adequately specifies the kinds of patients for whom medical marijuana may be indicated.

Allowing NPs and PAs to make these decisions not only could lighten the workload for some physicians, but most importantly would serve the well-being of patients in rural areas – a vast percentage of our state – who ordinarily are not served or known by physicians. These patients, under the current law, must travel long distances at significant financial and physical cost, to see physicians who are far less familiar with their circumstances than are their local NPs and PAs.

The other provisions in House Bill 311 seem very reasonable to me as well. Their purpose is to make it easier for approved, registered patients to have the medicine they need, when they need it, without fearing arrest and prison.

I hope you will help Montana's medical marijuana law work as voters intended, by passing House Bill 311.

Thank-you for your consideration.